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Widening Front Avenue

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Later in 1936 the private company sued the City and the RFC (Reconstruction Finance Corporation) for failing to make good on their contract. In 1941, the Oregon Circuit Court, sitting in The Dalles, ruling that the market was not a general obligation of the City. But a year later, the Oregon Supreme Court declared the City liable for damages plus interest. And on Jan. 1, 1943, the Public Market Company closed the building.

During the war years, the US Navy leased the building.

In 1946, the property was to be sold to the Oregon Journal for \$750,000, and it was converted to a printing plant.

In March of 1947, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review an appeal by the City and in May of the same year, the City agreed to a \$1,094,124 payment--\$739,124 to the RFC and \$355,000 to the Public Market Company.

Widening Front Avenue.

The third element of Laurgaard's so-called 'Waterfront Improvement Project,' the proposed widening of Front Avenue, was still not a serious prospect for completion as late as March of 1937 when the City Club promoted a project to "... widen Front Avenue ..." and acquire "... land east of Front Avenue and between Morrison and Burnside Streets to be developed and used for recreational and park purposes." (Emphasis mine) This would have produced a major riverfront development, even though the City Club report went on to describe the 'main objective' of such a plan, "aside from presenting a beautified water front, to facilitate the movement of traffic to and through the west side business district." The City Club envisioned that a major improvement of the kind proposed would "... contribute to the rehabilitation of the areas east of SW Third Avenue ... making this area more desirable and usable ..." and opining that "... for various reasons, this is the area in which future business growth should logically occur."

So the project they supported would widen Front Street to improve traffic circulation north to south, but leave substantial open space on the waterfront for recreation and park. This would have produced Waterfront Park essentially as it is today. What happened to this idea?

The Committee itself was uncertain about the financing of such a plan. Assessments against abutting properties was certainly out of the question. Abutting properties had already suffered such a burden--to pay for the interceptor sewer, the pumping plant and the seawall, all completed some 8 years earlier. Plus it wasn't logical to assess the costs of a city arterial on such a small proportion of the beneficiaries.

The City Club argued that at least part of the funds should come from the State Highway Fund--noting that in the 17 years before 1934, Multnomah County had contributed over \$67 Million to State highways and bridges while the State had spent only \$11 Million within Multnomah County. Some of that \$56 Million should be coming back to the local jurisdictions. And because the project would generate a good deal of employment, they also expected that the federal W.P.A. might be willing to cover at least part of the cost.

The Committee concluded that the Front Avenue project should be undertaken; and that funds should be secured from three sources of money: an allocation of State Highway Funds, a W.P.A. grant and a general assessment on all property in the City.
[See Portland City Club Bulletin, Volume 17, No. 46; March 12, 1937]

December 1, 1937: Letter from Portland City Council and Building Owners and Managers Association urging State Highway funds to relieve congestion on the west side of the Willamette River in downtown Portland.

December 19, 1938: From the minutes of the State Highway Commission: "A delegation from Portland, representing the Metropolitan Association, came before the Commission in the interests of the improvement of Front Avenue as an arterial highway route for north-bound and south-bound traffic through the Portland Westside business district. The delegation was headed by Mr. Wm. F. Woodward, and included the following: Mayor Jos. K. Carson, Jr.; David B. Simpson, representing the Building Owners and Managers Association; Vernon Scott, representing the Packer-Scott Company; George Friede, Representative in the state legislature; Robert Strong; George Lawrence; John Logan, Attorney; and others."

"The members of the delegation reiterated arguments heretofore presented on behalf of this improvement, from the standpoint of both traffic and business interests. They declared that something must be done to relieve traffic congestion and gave as their thought that the improvement of Front Avenue as an arterial highway connection is the most feasible solution. They alleged that, due to the decrease in property valuations and obligations the City of Portland is required to meet, it would not be possible for the city to cooperate financially in this project. They urged the Commission to proceed with the improvement in order to take care of north- and south-bound traffic through Portland's Westside district, which they declared is of vital concern. Speaking in behalf of this project were Mayor Carson and Messrs. Woodward, Simpson, Scott, Friede, Strong, Lawrence, and Logan."

* "Chairman Cabell advised that the Commission is glad to have the viewpoint of the members of the Metropolitan Association and that the Commission realizes that one of its obligations is to provide for traffic needs through metropolitan areas throughout the state. It is an acute problem, he said, and is just one of the problems that is growing larger as time goes on. The difficult with the Front Avenue plan, he said, is twofold: first, its magnitude, and in this connection the Commission believes that if and when it starts this improvement, it should not do an inferior job, and to do a good job will cost an enormous amount of money. The second difficulty, he said, is the cost of right of way, which is very expensive along the route of Front Avenue. He pointed out that the Commission was favorably inclined to the project at one time and indications were that construction would proceed; but the plans did not materialize because the city of Portland could not furnish the right of way, which was a prerequisite to construction. He mentioned that there are rumors that the Federal Government, through Congress, will provide funds for undertakings of this kind, including the acquisition of right of way, and advised that if Congress does provide such funds, then it would be possible to revive this project; but there is a question as to the feasibility of the project unless the state is able to secure financial assistance from some other source. He thanked the delegation for its presentation and concluded the conference by stating that the Commission will keep the project in mind and will do the best it can for it."

July 27, 1939: From the minutes of the State Highway Commission: "A delegation representing the Metropolitan Association, Portland, came before the Commission on behalf of the reconstruction of Front Street, Portland, as an arterial route. The delegation consisted of the following: Chester A. Moores, President; Mayor Joseph K. Carson, Jr.; Frederick H. Strong, member Executive Committee; and U. L. Upson, Secretary.

"Mr. Moores stated that they have only one object in appearing before the Commission at this time and that it is simply to urge the Commission's earnest and serious consideration of this project so that it can go forward expeditiously. He also said that they have no objections to offer as to how the matter is to be handled but want something done at once to improve present conditions, which, he alleged, are a disgrace to the City of Portland."

"Mayor Carson stated that his project is the most necessary highway improvement in Portland today. He asked the Commission to choose the route and handle it the same way as the Union Avenue project was handled rather than to leave the choice of the route to the people. If it is left to the vote of the people, he said, there is a possibility that the project will be voted out, whereas, if the Highway Commission handles it exclusively, that can be avoided. He pointed out that property values in this part of Portland are now particularly low and predicted that the improvement of Front Street would revive these values; furthermore, it would be of great benefit to the City of Portland as a whole. He offered full cooperation of the Portland City Council in every way possible and advised that the City is not asking the state to pay the cost of all of the right of way but simply a just proportion of the same on a basis comparable to purchases made by the Commission in other parts of the state."

"The City of Portland, he added, must raise its funds by assessment, which will require the formulation of an assessment district. He concluded the presentation by stating that the traffic situation in Portland's westside district can never be handled properly until the completion of the Front Street project, and strongly urged the Commission to do something about it at the earliest possible time."

"Mr. Strong alleged that it is wrong to tie up traffic in the city of Portland as is now being done by the use of inadequate arterial routes. He declared that it takes nearly as much time, under present conditions, for people to go where they want to within the city limits as it does to reach the city from upstate towns."

* "Chairman Cabell advised that the commission realizes the desirability of having an arterial highway through the city of Portland and that it is the generally accepted thought now that the motorist should pay more for arterial routes in the cities than in the past. The Highway Commission, he said, is interested in the adoption of an arterial route through Portland's Westside district, as is evidenced by the fact that studies are now being made of the alternate routes, one of which is along Front Street, and added that, as a citizen of Portland, he would like to see Front Street improved for such use, not only from the utility standpoint but also for the development of the recreational area along the river front. He declared that there are two groups that would be benefited particularly by the Front Street improvement, the property owners along Front Street and those as far west as 5th or 6th Streets. He referred to the next allocation of federal funds and expressed a hope that a plan could be worked out that would be satisfactory to all concerned, whereby a limited portion of such funds could be applied to finance a project in Portland. He reiterated that the Commission is now making a thorough study of conditions and routes and when the plans and estimates have been prepared the Commission will be pleased to discuss them with the Metropolitan Association. Commissioners Aldrich and Clough concurred in the remarks of the Chairman. This concluded the conference."

November 1, 1939: From the minutes of the State Highway Commission: "... at 8 o'clock p.m., the Commission met with members of the Portland City Council and the Portland City Planning Commission in the city council chambers for a discussion of matters pertaining to the proposed Front Street arterial highway in Portland. All members of the State Highway Commission were present at such meeting, as were also the State Highway Engineer, the Attorney, and the Secretary. The City Council was represented by Mayor Jos. K. Carson, Jr., and City Commissioners R. Earl Riley and William A. Bowes, and Ben Morrow, City Engineer. The City Planning Commission was represented by Harry D. Freeman, Planning Engineer. Mayor Carson presided.

* "The Front Street project was discussed at considerable length from the standpoint of need, engineering, and finance, and with particular reference to acquisition of right of way, but no definite decision was reached with respect to any of the points. The State Highway Engineer presented plans for the ultimate improvement and explained them briefly. He also advised the estimated cost of the project. Mr. Freeman made certain suggestions with respect to the improvement somewhat at variance with the plans as outlined by the State Highway Engineer. The conference was adjourned at 10:30 o'clock p.m. with the understanding that the State Highway Engineer would consult with the City Engineer and the Planning Engineer of the City Planning Commission relative to differences in engineering features, and with the further understanding that additional studies would be made and report rendered to the Highway Commission. The Highway Commission will then decide the maximum amount that the state can offer in financing the project and will transmit such information to the City Council, which will then ascertain the desires of the citizens of Portland with respect to the proposed improvement."

January 12, 1940: From the minutes of the State Highway Commission: "Matters pertaining to the proposed Front Street project, Portland, were discussed and in this connection the Attorney advised that the Portland City Council desires a conference with the Commission for consideration of right of way matters incident thereto; also, that the City officials have requested that someone from the State Highway Department be assigned to work with the city authorities in appraising properties along this route. After discussion, the Commission authorized the Attorney to assign one of his right of way agents to work with the city officials in making such appraisals, it being understood, however, that options are not to be taken.

"The Engineer discussed with the Commission the program of state finance projects that have been approved for construction in 1940. He pointed out that the commission has already approved an item of \$767,000 in the 1940 budget to finance state work on primary highways, and an item of \$385,00 to finance state work on secondary highways, or a total of \$1,152,000, and some time ago approved individual projects to take up these amounts. He questioned the advisability of approving additional projects until it is known whether or not those already approved will take up the amounts available. This matter was discussed briefly and the Engineer was instructed to prepare a list of approved projects and report the same to the Commission at the next meeting."

February 27, 1940: From the minutes of the State Highway Commission: "The Attorney reported the progress that is being made in the appraisal of property along Front Street, Portland, where it is planned to construct an arterial highway. He said that practically all of the appraisals have been made and that he has been requested by one of the City Commissioners to furnish him with the information assembled. In this connection the Engineer advised that he plans to submit to the Commission at its March meeting a full report on the Front Street project, including estimates of the cost of right of way and

construction. The Commission decided, after discussion, not to divulge to anyone information assembled in regard to right of way and construction until the Commission has had an opportunity to study the report."

March 31, 1940: Start anew from here.

Review maps and drawings included in "Graphic Art Drawings #3" of Separate Inventory Listings:

- 30. *Portland: Proposed Traffic interchange between Front Avenue, Harbor Drive and Steel Bridge, 1943, revised 1948. Flats 4.6-17*
- 69. **Extension Arterial Highway System into and through Portland.** 1939, Flats 4x6-29.
- 78. *Extension . . . same as 69 . . . Two drawings, Flats 4x6-32.*
- 87. *Proposed Development of Marine Park - Portland waterfront. 1942, Flats 2x4-6.*
- 108. *Photographic copies to be interfiled with the originals, including the following portfolios: 1-5 Portland highways and waterfront.*

State Highway Division Builds Harbor Drive.

In 1940, the City Club again supported a bond issue for the widening of Front Avenue. But this time, the City and the State Highway Division were proposing not just a widened Front Avenue (to 6 lanes in a 100' right of way), but a brand new 6-lane freeway (to be called Harbor Drive) planted within a few feet of the seawall! (The proposed Harbor Drive had to be narrowed to 4 lanes at the Market Building so it could fit between the Market Building and the sea wall.) The bond issue passed. What caused the change in plan from a widened Front Avenue to a brand new 6-lane Harbor Drive on the waterfront? (It may be that state and federal funds were available for a new highway, but not for a widening of Front Avenue.)

By the end of June, 1942, all of the buildings along the eastern side of Front Avenue were demolished, and the space between a widened Front Avenue and the river covered by a massive concrete Market Building (which was by then vacant) and 6 lanes of concrete for cars. A total of 79 buildings and houses were razed to make room just for Harbor Drive. And the last of the old buildings on Front Avenue, including many of the familiar landmarks of pioneer Portland were swept away to widen Front Avenue. Need more about this. Note, especially, the coverage in the newspapers about the demolition of the buildings along Front and the construction and dedication of Harbor Drive).

A widened Front Avenue was opened in _____. Harbor Drive was officially opened in November of 1942.